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SUBJECT: GOL PLEDGES REINFORCED COOPERATION RE AFRICAN
TRAFFICKERS

REF: VIENTIANE 378

Classified By: Ambassador Ravic R. Huso for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 26 meeting, Minister to the President's Office Soubanh Srithirath, who is also Chairman of the Lao National Commission on Drug Control and Supervision (LCDC), told Ambassador that LCDC has been directed to reinforce its cooperation with U.S. DEA and the U.S. Embassy on combating West African drug traffickers operating in Laos. Minister Soubanh described new Government of Laos (GOL) measures to control West African criminal activity in Laos and advised that LCDC has been made the focal point for coordinating such measures. Within his reference to LCDC, the minister included the Ministry of Public Securities' Drug Control Department (DCD) chief; post will take this as encouragement to increase direct law enforcement to law enforcement cooperation with DCD. New GOL directives on dealing with West Africans are a direct result of post pressure on Lao counterparts to take action. End summary.

New Measures to Counter African Traffickers

¶2. (C) In an August 26 meeting, Minister to the President's Office Soubanh Srithirath briefed Ambassador on Government of Laos (GOL) policy discussions following up on a U.S.-sponsored June conference on West African drug traffickers (see reftel). Minister Soubanh had prepared a report on the conference that he submitted to the Prime Minister. Minister Soubanh advised that in subsequent consultations with the Prime Minister, Minister of Public Security and other senior officials, cooperation received from the U.S. DEA office in Vientiane was praised and the Lao National Commission on Drug Control and Supervision (LCDC) which Soubanh chairs) was directed to reinforce cooperation with the U.S. Embassy -- and DEA specifically -- on the West African trafficker issue. Direction has also been provided to other Lao government entities as follows:

-- Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been instructed to cease issuing visas on arrival to citizens of selected African countries. (Note: Other conversations indicated that the list of affected countries has not yet been finalized. End note.)

-- Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been instructed to have Lao embassies to be stricter in reviewing visa applications from citizens of selected African countries, with more attention paid to the claimed purpose of the visit to Laos. Embassies are also to take more care to send back to Vientiane information collected from Africans who have received Lao visas regarding their intended places of stay, names of sponsors and contact numbers.

-- Lao Tourism Authority has been instructed to tell hotels and guesthouses to pay particular attention to the activities of African guests.

-- District leaders in Vientiane Municipality and provincial governors have been instructed to pay particular attention to the activities of Africans.

Focal Point, Not Task Force

13. (C) Regarding formation of a (U.S.-proposed) GOL interagency task force to focus on West African traffickers, Minister Soubanh advised that the GOL had decided against the idea, for at least the time being, due to shortage of personnel who could be dedicated to this effort. LCDC, he said, has been designated as the focal point for coordinating GOL actions to fight West African traffickers. Within LCDC, however, Minister Soubanh also included the head of the Ministry of Public Security's Drug Control Department (DCD), which works closely with LCDC. Ambassador emphasized U.S. willingness to provide training and basic equipment support to GOL efforts regarding West African traffickers and advised that Embassy officials would be in touch with DCD and LCDC to work out a program of further cooperation.

4.(C) Comment: The GOL decision to provide these internal directives for increased focus on the problem of West African traffickers is in large part a direct result of post pressure on Lao counterparts over recent months to take action. While post had hoped to see establishment of some form of operational task force to bring different GOL agencies together to work with DEA on this issue, we plan to use Minister Soubanh's inclusion of the DCD chief in his LCDC "focal point" to expand USG assistance to DCD and direct U.S. law enforcement to Lao law enforcement information exchange with DCD.

HUSO